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THE BASQUE CONFLICTS AND E.T.A. TERRORISM TODAY

Prof. Dr. Anghel ANDREESCU

National Defence University "Carol I"/ Doctoral School/ Bucharest/ Romania

Drd. Raluca COŞEA

National Defence University "Carol I" / Doctoral School/ Military Sciences/ Bucharest/
Romania

Abstract:

Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) translated as Basque Homeland and Freedom, was founded in 1959 by a group of men from Bilbao, Spain. This organization had an extreme impact on Spanish politics and society in Europe and one of the most important factors of ETA's radical nationalism were women members. Basque women were active in all areas of ETA, including the military wing, political party's trades unions, etc.

After Scotland's vote against its independence from Britain, it is possible that other separatist movements across the globe, from Europe to Asia, to the Middle East, to Africa will start sending signals for breaking all borders. The political fights all over the world, Scotland, China, fighting with the Uighurs in Xinjiang and Tibet, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, started a fire in people's hearts. Catalonia and the Basque Country in Spain and Flanders in Belgium, are considered the most influential regions and similar with the political and socioeconomic conditions of Scotland.

In October 2011, the Basque separatist group ETA announced the cessation of its armed activities, but no one will assure that terrorist actions will not happen again.

Key words: terrorism, ETA, Basque country, women, political violence, nationalism.

1. Introduction

Despite the global negative effects of 9/11, counterterrorist polices are divergent when it comes to Europe and other parts of the world. Terrorist threats faced by Europe and China share few similarities. China now faces separatist movements that resort more and more to terrorist attacks, while in Europe well known ethnic-separatist terrorist organizations, like ETA or IRA, are on the decline. EU's main concern is now Islamic radicalism and political right and left-wing extremism [1].

Marxist and socialist concepts are the ideology of left-wing terrorists. Left wing terrorism began with the terrorist group Narodnaya Volya, from the 19th-century that killed in 1881 Alexander II of Russia and advanced the concept of propaganda by the deed [2]. In the 19th century, in Western Europe, groups of left and right wing terrorism included the West German Red Army Faction (RAF), the Italian Red Brigades, the French Action

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Direkte (AD), and the Belgian Communist Combatant Cells (CCC). On September 11, 2001 hastened ETA's decline and within months the Spanish government and the European Union member states, declared ETA a terrorist organization [3].

Centuries ago, Basque was spoken in a much larger area than today, but it has long disappeared outside what most call "the Basque Country," or "Euskal Herria," an area that covers about 8,000 square miles in four Spanish and three French provinces.

And even many of the three million people who live within that area would dispute that they're part of a unified Basque "country." The largest and southernmost of the Spanish provinces, Nafarroa was for centuries the heart of a kingdom that controlled large portions of northern Spain, and today it is a separate autonomous community.

Another southern Basque province, Araba, has long had close ties with Castile, the geographical and political center of Spain, and most of its population does not speak Euskara and hasn't for centuries. Even in the coastal provinces of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, where one hears the most Basque today, industrialization brought migrants from all corners of Spain. Most of them never considered themselves to be Basque. Then there is the most obvious separation of all, the Spanish-French border, which has set off the three northernmost Basque Provinces since 1512.

But to many Basque nationalists, these divisions are simply the most recent in many thousands of years of obstacles they've overcome. An elderly once told that about his grandfather, that once took him to a bridge built by Romans in the Basque countryside. "The Romans are gone," the grandfather told, pointing to the bridge. "We're still here. [4]"

2. The beginnings and journey of ETA

Founded in 1959, on Marxist principles, the group's leader started his journey with the desire of establishing an independent homeland which would encompass the Spanish Basque provinces of Guipuzcoa, Alava and Vizcaya; Navarra, an autonomous region; and the French territories of Labourd, Basse-Navarre, and Soule [5].

ETA's constructed its bases onto the Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco or PNV), founded back in 1894 and activated illegally in Paris, under the fascist regime of Francisco Franco. On the 8th of October 1997, ETA was designated by the US Government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and also listed as a terrorist organization by Spain and the EU.

From its origins ETA was considered separate from home and family. The organization's codes of conduct, borrowed from other terrorist groups such as the IRA, explained how each activist should give up their personal needs and completely dedicate themselves to the organization.

When it came to gender, Basque nationalism considered women as caregivers and those that can preserve the national tradition. Sabino Arana's nationalist writings mention that nationalist men could marry outside the national collective. But, a woman thinking of a marriage with a Spanish man was a threat to the purity of the Basque nation. Women succeeded in forming a women's nationalist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, under the name of Emakume Abertzale Batza (EAB). EAB consisted in concepts like motherhood, womanhood, nation and family, concepts that helped the individual to enter in a new family, culture and society. The creation of women's groups affiliated with Basque Nationalist movements resulted in a number of women from Basque nationalist families, extending their activities in public and political spheres. These actions didn't threaten the gender hierarchy within Basque society.

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Women were present in writings about ETA, during the first two decades, but only in relation to family and culture. In the early '60, women appeared as identity symbols of Basque culture as the Zutik newsletter explains in 1961:

“Against such a general concept of Woman as a pleasant promise, against the ‘Don Juan’ mentality, against the concept of the ‘Lady’ – a beautiful and idealized, but depersonalized thing – the Basque opposes his transcendental conception of Woman as mother and Etxekoandre, Lady of the House.”

Although men dominated organizations as leaders, the same thing happening in ETA in its first decade, three women were sent to trial in Burgos military trial in 1970, and by the end of that decade ‘Yoyes’, Dolores Gonzalez Katarain, had become one of the leaders in ETA. In July 2009, two women and two men were held responsible by the Spanish police forces for planting a car bomb that killed two officers in Mallorca.

Before hiding, Sorazabal was spokeswoman for ETA prisoners’ rights. She was held in Spain and sent to prison in France, because of a number of armed actions. After the arrest of Aitor Elizarán Aguilar, one of the most important leaders of ETA, Sorazabal is now expected to take the lead.

ETA’s fifth conference in 1966, led to the organization’s ideologically split into the “nationalist wing” (ETA-V) and the “ideologist wing” (ETA-VI). The nationalist wing followed the Basque autonomy, but the ideologists preferred the Marxist-Leninist ideas of Basque Independence.

Repeatedly, the Francisco Franco regime tried to dissolve ETA through arrests, beatings, assassinations and torture and by the '70 most of ETA’s leaders were trialed and sentenced to prison. In 2002, the political party Batasuna, also ETA’s political wing was banned by the Spanish Parliament and its members were charged with providing material support to the terrorist group. The ban was upheld until June 2009 and in 2010, parts of ETA separated from the political party, becoming an autonomous organization.

The group chose the name *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA) and wrote its founding document in July 1959. The organization outlines its main characteristics in a short document. The organization wanted to be seen as *a patriotic, non-religious, non-political group with the goal of “saving the Basque soul” and “the self-determination of our homeland’s destiny [6]*.

It was not expected that ETA would become an organization engaged in terrorism and violence. ETA activates mainly in the Basque autonomous regions of northern Spain and southwestern France, but maintains their presence in Cuba and Venezuela. After publicly announcing the cease of fire in 2011, funds become scarce and revolutionary taxes were no more collected, even though extortion was one of the major sources of income for ETA.

ETA began with bombings and assassinations, their aims were Spanish government officials, businessmen, politicians, judicial figures, security, military forces, but also journalists and tourists. The group took responsibility for killing 829 civilians, members of the police, since the beginning of a violence campaign in 1968.

Over the last four decades, ETA has committed numerous attacks the most important being the car bombing in Madrid, in February 2005, where more than 20 people were wounded. Later, in December 2006, a car exploded and destroyed the parking garage at Madrid’s Barajas International Airport. In 2009, it marked its fiftieth anniversary, by a series of deadly bombings.

On December 20, 1973, members of ETA, disguised as electricians working on cables, detonated a bomb and disappeared in the chaos that followed. The explosion aimed Carrero Blanco’s car. The Spanish Prime Minister, Carrero Blanco was killed, along with

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his driver and his bodyguard. ETA claimed responsibility for the assassination, and confirmed it later in a press conference in France.

The assassination changed Spain's history, as Carrero Blanco was considered the person clever enough to continue Franco's dictatorship after his death. The throne was reclaimed by Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón and Spain's conversion to a constitutional monarchy began. The ETA organization was at its peak and it could have been considered by history as a successful resistance movement fighting fascism, but things didn't stop there [7].

In 2012, numerous arrests took place and those being arrested were members of terrorist groups, mainly ETA. At the beginning of the year, on January 25, French police arrested Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) member Ernesto Prat Urzainqui, one of Spain's most wanted terrorists [8]. Later, on the 27th of May, Oroitz Gurruchaga Gorgorza, the military leader of ETA and his deputy, Xabier Aramburu, were arrested in the southwestern French village of Cuana. Their arrests were the result of a joint operation between the French Internal Security Service, the Spanish Civil Guard, and the Spanish intelligence services. At the end of October, French authorities and the Spanish Civil Guard arrested ETA members Izaskun Lesaka Arguelles and Joseba Iturbide Ochoteco. Lesaka was one of the three members of ETA's leadership ("Holy Trinity") who read many of the group's communiqués in televised statements [9].

The most important relations that ETA has established over the years are with the Irish Republican Army, the Algerian Islamic Group. The Algerian Islamic Group received training regarding the production of explosives and guerrilla warfare. Moreover, ETA obtained weapons, logistic support and safe houses from Islamic networks in Europe and training in Iranian and Lebanese, Libya, Lebanon, and Nicaragua [10].

In June 2005 the Spanish Parliament began talks about the need of ETA's disarmament. ETA mentioned it was willing to talk but not to disarm, meanwhile 250,000 people were demonstrating against the government's negotiations with ETA.

A "permanent cease-fire" was announced by ETA to take effect on 24th of March 2006. At that moment, ETA explained that: "*The object of this decision is to drive the democratic process.*" Changing his earlier position, Spanish President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero decided to start negotiations with ETA in spite of their refusal to disarm. The Popular Party, Spain's conservative opposition removed its support for peace talks, protesting in June 2006 against the government's decision.

Unfortunately, in December 2006, a car bomb exploded at Madrid's international airport, killing two men, ETA claimed responsibility for the bombing. A year later, in 2007, ETA announced another cease-fire but they were suspected of attacking later in the summer. Although ETA's power has decreased over the years, security experts inform that the separatists can still prove disruptive and deadly [11].

In 1995, an ETA car bomb was aimed at killing Jose Maria Aznar, then leader of the conservative Popular Party, who later served as Spain's prime minister. Another attack disrupted by the investigators, was a plot to assassinate King Juan Carlos. Moreover, in March 2008, a former city councilman was killed by ETA in northern Spain two days before the elections. According to an estimation made by the Spanish government, ETA has killed over 800 people and carried out over 1,600 terrorist attacks. Also, ETA has consistently targeted Spain's tourist attractions, attacking buses along Costa del Sol. According to the newspaper El País, from 1994 to 2003, ETA's attacks cost the Spanish government approximately \$11 billion [12].

After October 2011, a militarily weakened and politically isolated ETA was obligated to announce the definitive cessation of arms, but Madrid rejected the

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announcement after several false ceasefires. Madrid demanded that ETA would disarm and disband, but until now, formally that did not happen.

Since 2007, approximately 500 members of ETA have been arrested, even 12 arrests in 2013, in France and in Spain. Venezuelan and French security forces helped in apprehending an ETA member on September 20 in Venezuela, and on the 8th of October another ETA member was caught by the Belgian police. Authority's estimate that those who have not been captured until now, are fewer than 100 and approximately 750 ETA members are now held in Spanish and French prisons. David Pla and Iratxe Sorzabal, leaders of ETA, were permitted refuge in Norway during the early period of the ceasefire, but were expelled after no progress was made in the peace process.

Between 1975 and 1983, the percentage of ETA women prisoners came to approximately 9% as shown in the table below.

Date	Prisoners	Women	%
November 1975	356	34	10
January 1976	373	38	10
July 1980	138	4	3
1981	351	36	10
February 1983	349	22	6
July/August 1983	403	33	8

Table 1 Number of women ETA prisoners between 1975-1983

3. Conclusion

ETA was formed at the end of the 1950's by young Basque nationalists who were against General Franco's dictatorship. At that moment, Franco responded by imposing a state of emergency in parts of the Basque country. After Franco's death in 1975, the group did not disappear, and 1980, the most cruel year, when almost 100 people were killed at that time when Spain was still considered a young democracy.

Slowly, Spain's security forces inhibited ETA's ability to attack and the result was that in its last decade of violence no more than five people were killed each year.

The Basque separatist group Eta took a historic step and handed over weapons and bomb-making equipment used in its terror campaign for independence that has claimed more than 800 victims over decades. Declarations of former Eta members mentioned that the majority of the group's arms were hidden in France, where the old command and logistics base was situated. Eight years ago, Spanish media reported that members of ETA stole 400 pistols from an arms depot in Vauvert, France. Also, in the past, the group is known to have had SA-7 ground-to-air missiles.

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